

From a Dark Convoy, Stalin's Specter Looms

By FRANCIS X. CLINES

Special to The New York Times

VILNIUS, Lithuania, March 24 — When Povilas Zavadskas arose and saw the tanks go by his front window at 4 o'clock this morning, all the shadowy appeal to memory that is at the heart of Lithuania's struggle for sovereignty was before him.

For him, the Soviet tanks represented not so much real force as an appeal to the memory of force, the old Stalinist force he recalled so well, routing his grandparents from their farm to Siberian exile and death.

"My grandparents would greet this moment with tears," he said 12 hours later. He was referring not so much to the tanks as to the memory of Lithuanian independence, lost 50 years ago and reclaimed only this month in a defiant proclamation by the republic's Parliament.

"The tanks cannot frighten me," said the 62-year-old musician, tending small blue flowers in his garden just off Zalgirio Street, where the 59 tanks with their support vehicles had rumbled by in the dark.

Painful Recollections

The column was somewhat simplistically described as a show of Soviet force in the face of Lithuania's resolve to stay independent of Moscow. But to Lithuanians along Zalgirio Street it was more of an appeal to memory, and an odd one at that, from Mikhail S. Gorbachev, the post-Stalinist democratizer who finds himself stirring dark recollections of forced annexation as he fights to maintain his national union.

"My grandparents knelt before the Soviet soldiers and begged to be shot rather than leave their farm," Mr. Zavadskas said. His blue eyes showed tears for an instant, then resolve.

"It is difficult to speak," he said, the cold wind of the Vilnius spring moving across the garden. "This is the rebirth of Lithuania, and I remember Stalin's time and my grandparents' suffering."



Lithuanians said they would not be intimidated by the Kremlin parade of armor in Vilnius.

'To use fright is to use force,' a Lithuanian complains.

Down the street, 4-year-old Inga Taunyte slept through the armored procession, but her mother was at the window.

"So much noise," said Arune Taunyte. "I began to count them." She said the tanks made her think that "psychologically, we are prepared for much worse." Standing on Zalgirio Street, she made the case that "to use fright is to use force."

"I was surprised when I talked later with my friends and they thought there would be no force because they trust Gorbachev," she added.

People living along the tank route hardly seemed frightened the morning after.

"We sleep so hard that nothing can awaken me," said Lyusya Guzhevskaya, a Russian-born resident who supported Mr. Gorbachev's latest challenge of Lithuania. "We must all go on living."

Refuting the Comparison

"It's been years since 1940," said a dark-haired woman named Danute who walked along a mud path past some wooden houses.

"I do not remember Stalin," she said, although she acknowledged that some of her forebears suffered exile and death after the annexation of Lithuania. "Gorbachev was the first to rebuild democracy; you cannot compare Stalin and Gorbachev."

Others showed emotions more complex than fright. It was as if the specter of the tanks, while actually witnessed by very few in Lithuania, finally certified how far its move for independence had progressed.

"Force may happen. It's hard to tell," one woman said in a conversation in which her face suddenly shifted to doubt and tears. "My children are small," she said in simple explanation, moving on down the street after firmly endorsing the independence gamble.

An Identity Rediscovered

Mrs. Taunyte said that breaking away from Soviet control meant "a person having the possibility to know what he is."

"It's too late to frighten us," she concluded.

"Fright?" asked Mr. Zavadskas. He insisted that the dark convoy had delivered energy to the republic. "We are rebuilding Lithuania as it was."

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Rediscovering an Identity

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